DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 151 040 JC 780 128

AUTHOR Wood, Kenneth N.
TITLE Centering-Venturing: An Approach to Student Development. Perspectives on the Church and the Community College, Paper Number Thirteen.
INSTITUTION United Ministries in Higher Education, Portland, Oreg.
PUB DATE [78]
NOTE 17p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Aspiration; Goal Orientation; Higher Education; *Improvement Programs; Individual Development; Junior Colleges; Life Style; Needs Assessment; Objectives; Personal Growth; Personal Values; Program Descriptions; *Self Actualization; *Self Congruence; Skill Development; *Student Development; *Workshops
IDENTIFIERS Centering Venturing; Davidson County Community College NC

ABSTRACT

The Centering-Venturing workshop program at Davidson College in North Carolina, designed to help students identify personal strengths and skills, is reviewed. The program includes an orientation meeting at which connections and integrations between different facets of self and between self and environment are presented, and four workshop sessions where 30 participants are taught to extract clearly defined skills and strengths from their experiences. About one hour of each session is devoted to exercises through which data on individual values, interests, life periods, ambitions, work styles, and commitments are generated. Simple relaxation and meditation techniques are used to help people move beyond the quantitative and superficial; this is believed to promote learning from images, symbols, and metaphors where much important qualitative information is stored. Between the third and fourth sessions, a day or more of practice information gathering allows students to contact people who have made connections in their lives and helps them to identify what the world requires and what personal resources will help in their own lives and work. Prioritized objectives on life, work, learning, and personal growth from long-term, intermediate, and short-term perspectives are articulated during the final session. (TR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED151040

PERSPECTIVES

on

The Church and the Community College

Paper Number Thirteen

CENTERING-VENTURING: AN APPROACH TO STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

By:
Kenneth N. Wood

United Ministries in Higher Education

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Preface by - Earl J. Lowell
Associate Dean of Instruction
Rockland Community College
Suffern, New York

JC 780 128

Kenneth N. Wood is director of the Office for Experiential Programs and Life/Work Planning, Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina

UNITED MINISTRIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION
848 Pittock Block
Portland, Oregon 97205

PREFACE
By: Earl J. Lowell

Community colleges are different from other colleges. But when one looks at community colleges, care is needed not to assume false dichotomy regarding students, their needs, and the educational responsibilities of the colleges. While Kenneth Wood's Centering-Venturing is used by him at a private, four-year liberal residential college, the synchronization he calls for between an "experience of self" and an "experience with our environment" is equally valid for the community college students in career or liberal arts programs whether they be 18 or 80 years old. The question of "what's available" is not asked only by the young, but by the persons struggling with mid-career change or retirement. The need to discover "it's all available" is not confined to any one group or age.

This article then is, for the reading, not for learning what "they" do, but what we can do. The community colleges with their community relations and expanding community base education should be able to discover alternate and exciting ways of venturing for its clientele as alternative one-day trips from a residential campus.

With regard to centering, Sunday might meetings might not command the largest crowds at community colleges. However, community colleges which have continually found innovative ways of providing counseling support for the mobile population could certainly use community base counseling centers, special seminars, and other vehicles for the centering process. Some might even find a place and time within the credit structure of the instruction.

What is suggested is that Centering-Venturing is a critical concept which community colleges should explore. Alternatives and improvements in student career development, whatever their age or major, is a concern of not only private residential colleges, but public community colleges as well.

One of my fondest memories is a day spent with my 80 year old grandfather harvesting a small field of rye with a cradle scythe when I was 10 years old. Whether the binder was out of order or the field was too small to use it, I don't remember. But, that day cutting, typing and shocking rye was my earliest and most memorable encounter with the idea of integrating self and environment through work.

The Rhythm of Work

Grandad told me that day about the rhythm as with smooth strokes he sliced relentlessly through the field. "When you get the rhythm," he said, with confident smile, "You can work all day long and enjoy every minute of it."

"If that's what it takes to make back breaking labor fun," I thought, "Teach me the rhythm." And how I tried to learn it. But in my hands the scythe might as well have been a rockingchair. The blade almost always struck into the ground with rhythm-destroying thud and then jerked loose. The strands fell the wrong way, the knots didn't hold, the shocks fell over and I didn't understand why we needed all that rye in the first place. I knew what I needed to do but my heart was not in it, nor my head, nor my body. I was out of sinc. I didn't integrate well into that scene -- not the way my grandfather did.

Whenever I take time to think about the quality of my work I remember my grandfather -- and the rhythm. I will always know that it's possible to experience the integration of self with environment through work. The remembrance of a past experience reminds me and calls me to seek and find such rhythmic connections in everything I do.

Romantic, yes. But the promise of organic wholeness, of integrity, of competency, and harmony which this memory holds for me is real and powerful. It has contributed significantly to the development of my life and my work. It has helped to shape my sense of what it means to be a human being.

What I want to hold up here are not the old ways, nor the virtues of rural life, nor even a romantic view of work. Rather, I want to explore a few principles which I believe are fundamental to life and work and, are therefore, germaine to higher education.

Connections between Experience of Self and Experience with Environment

The basic principle, first modeled by my grandfather, but underscored by experience hundreds of times since is this: Life's deepest joys and satisfactions, as well as social benefit, are derived from an awareness and utilization of the connections between our experience of self and our experiences with our environment.

Illustrations of this principle abound.

A great musician senses the sounds that fit. And sometimes the fittings are so elegant that one has the ecstatic sensation of being linked with the very universe.

A potter describes the synergy between self and clay. The two connect to create something authentic, fitting, in harmony with the natural order -- bringing joy to both the craftsman and the beholder.

A rock climber describes a special way of integrating with the rock -- it's as if they become one organic whole. Canoeists and kayakers report something similar with the stream.

A skilled administrator, while approaching an administrative problem, recognizes an especially appropriate match between urgent needs and available.

available resources. The closer the fit the greater the sense of satisfaction the administrator derives from his work.

It seems that there is an artful way of approaching (connecting with) nearly every task worth doing. There is a style of working which produces the ecstasy of the fitting connections, the integrations, the rhythmic movements.

Balance and Harmony

I believe that everyone has such peak experiences in one way or another. And when we do it powerfully illustrates the balance and harmony possible between persons and environments. Perhaps the quality of ones life may be measured by the degree to which one is in sinc or out of sinc, in time or out of time, in balance or out of balance, integrated or alienated, experiencing life whole or fragmented, making appropriate and fitting connections or going through life feeling out of sorts.

The same principle can be put in a cultural context. An anthropologist friend told me once that civilization was set back some 200 years when we all but completely destroyed the Indian cultures of this country. If ascending a hierarchy of ever more sophisticated or profound integrations between man and environment is characteristic of human development, he has a point. We need to regain the capacity to make more and better integrations between self and environment. Our cultural as well as our personal well being depends on it.

If this is universally relevant -- if living and working on Mondays in Denver or Davidson or Kalamazoo can be better integrated with self and environment -- then maybe we educators should be more straight-forward about every person's

capacity to be an intimate part of an evolving, creating process -- to art life, as it were. Maybe we should be more open about the potential rhythm, grace and joy of work. Maybe we should dare be more explicit about the ways in which the central core of a life might connect with other systems, organic or inorganic, personal, social or economic. Maybe we should strive in this way to recapture some of the dignity and grandeur of learning and living and working -- of being human.

One thing is certain. We will continue to organize our actions, our educational institutions and our educational programs around our beliefs. It matters, therefore, what principles guide us. It matters what vision we hold of the human potential.

A Different Set of Questions for Educators

If a student does have a central core which is connectable in a myriad of ways with his or her environment and if students will find life's greatest joys in experiencing the rhythm, balance and synchronisity of these connections -- we who think of ourselves as educators may face a different set of questions than those which more typically preoccupy us. Questions such as:

In which ways might we honor the principle that persons begin from their center and venture forth to make ever more fitting or synergistic connections with the environment?

In which ways might we formulate the kinds of programs in student development which enable a person to take charge of his or her life and artfully create his/her own future?

In which ways might education, whether liberal or vocational, support the connecting, integrating activity which feeds self creation and world creation?

In which ways might we return to students that which our system of education and socialization has, in large measure, taken away -- the ability to fully explore and make fitting connections between self and world.

No matter what else we say about the value of a liberal arts education and/or vocational training, if they do not help students to explore their world and make fitting connections between self and environment, they may have very little to do with that creative process so essential to our human nature and to our survival.

The Creative Process

On the one hand that process may be as simple as taking the time to identify who we are, where we belong and how to make the appropriate connections. On the other hand, it is as profound as discovering our sense of being, our sense of belonging and our sense of becoming.

Fitting Connections

How to discover fitting connections for my life and work and to help others discover such connections for their life and work -- these are the questions I most often confront in my work at Davidson. Occasionally I dare to be guided by the principles I profess, connections get made, ideas are tried, I learn from experience, I move with the currents, I expect to find the rhythm and the fit. And with a lot of help from my colleagues and from master connectors like Dick Bolles with the National Career Development Project, and Ross Mooney at Ohio State University -- programs take shape.

At Davidson the place where ideals and abstractions about rhythm and synergy translate into programmatic reality is in a non-academic, no-credit educational process we call Centering-Venturing. An adjunct to the curriculum, it grew directly

out of my frustrations with students who came to my office with the question, "What's available?" That triggers in me an unholy impatience. "What in the hell do you mean, what's available? It is all available!" And it is -- life is available -- cultures are available. Causes are available, problems are available, challenges are available, adventure is available -- life is available. The question of availability is seldom an appropriate first question. Far more appropriate are such questions as, What do I want? What do I need? Where is my growing edge? Where does my enthusiasm get focused? Where is the flow of my life taking me? What is issuing from me? What is coming to bud on the stem of my life? What is the nature of my journey through life? What does my center and my venture tell me about what I need to do next in order to bring me one step more into being, one step closer to belonging, one step higher into becoming?

What do I Want?

When farmers and fishermen read the signs they can predict the weather. When students are acquainted with their center and their venture, they can draw some very helpful hunches about what is coming up on their agenda. They sense more precisely what fits. They can create or art their Self and maybe even a piece of the world.

Challenge of the Program

That which challenges me most in my work with experiential education is not helping persons find "educational" experiences. Nor is it helping persons learn from such experiences. The immediate objective with which I struggle is to help persons learn how to learn from all life's experiences. And the long range goal is to develop persons who are able to recognize and make the connections

and integrations necessary for the creation of self and world. In other words, I seek to facilitate with students a process which will enable them to take full charge of the fundamental human enterprise of being, belonging and becoming.

I'm excited, yet humbled, by our meager beginnings. Excited because there seems to be something here which makes sense and is working. Humbled because it's a mere scratch on the surface.

"Here is How it Works"

Here, in brief, is how it works:

Toward the end of each of Davidson's three terms we place an ad in the biweekly campus announcement sheet reminding students of a Centering-Venturing workshop on the first four Sunday evenings, 5:00-8:30 p.m., of the up-coming term. Interested people, usually including 2-3 townspeople, sign up in the office. When we have 30 people on the list, I send them a note inviting them to a half hour orientation meeting.

Orientation

At the orientation, I briefly highlight ideas which flow from the principles above i.e., the fact that each one is unique and potent and that we will be getting more fully in touch with our uniqueness and potency in the workshop. I try to illustrate the connections and integrations which can be made between different facets of the Self and between Self and environment -- connections which only the individual can make.

I suggest that, by means of our making these connections, we may find a clearer sense of direction for our lives -- a sense of direction which will help in planning, managing and arting ones life and work. I tell them that my primary goal is to share a learning process which will

enable participants to learn how to learn from their experiences to make the connections which will serve them throughout their life and work.

Invariably someone exclaims in effect that this is the first time in their educational career when it was ever suggested that they must begin from within -- with the memory of their experiences.

Indentifying Unique Strengths and Skills

At the orientation meeting I start students on a process for identifying unique strengths and skills. For the first workshop session they are to have prepared a list of all their peak experiences, achievements, successes and accomplishments since they were two years old. Also, they are to have identified the 10 experiences which they enjoyed most and which are most illustrative of their particular flair or knack for getting something done. These are to be written up as detailed descriptions of the action taken. Before the orientation meeting is over each student is given a copy of our workbook, Centering-Venturing, and asked to become familiar with its contents for the workshop.

Analyzing the Material

At each of the first three workshop sessions the material which they have generated is analyzed or factored in groups of 2 or 3 for transferable skills -- those flairs or knacks we sometimes call natural abilities. The objective, again, is to learn an educational process which will enable us, at any point in time when we use it, to learn from our experiences. When we learn to extract clearly defined skills and other unique strengths from our experiences we have ready access to a wealth of information necessary for life/work decision making.

In addition to this, which occupies about 60 minutes of each workshop, we are involved in a number of other exercises of 15-30 minutes each by means of which we generate, in small groups of 5 or 6, ad-

ditional data in respect to individual values, interests, life periods, sense of what needs doing, dreams,ambitions, work style, motivations, commitments, special knowledge areas -- about 20 different aspects of our life experiences. It's like having 20 pieces of a puzzle which, when connected, enable one to see the picture.

Different Aspects of Life Experiences

In order to help people move beyond the quantitative and superficial, we often use simple relaxation exercises and meditation techniques. These facilitate learning from images, symbols and metaphors where a great deal of important qualitative information is stored.

By the third session, this material is placed by each person on one sheet of paper. We play with connections asking ourselves as we do this "Where are the pieces fitting together and striking an inner cord of excitement and enthusiasm?"

Fitting the Puzzle Together

Coming off this exercise most students are in touch with enough integration or focus to be able to identify types of people who might share with them an enthusiasm, a keen interest, a similar combination of values, interests and skills.

It is at this point, between the 3rd and 4th sessions, that we build into the workshop a day or more of practice information gathering. Here participants will travel 20 miles into Charlotte, the nearest city, to conduct prearranged or on-the-spot interviews with people who may have made connections with their lives from which the students might learn. Once again, the question is "What fits me?" The objective is to make a fitting connection between individual uniqueness and what needs doing in the world and to identify

We Practice Information Gathering

resources to help in the venturing we do with our life and work.

Objectives are Generated and Prioritized

On the last session of the workshop we generate and prioritize objectives -- considering life, work, adventure, learning and personal growth, in three time frames -- long term, intermediate, short range. Top priority objectives are brainstormed to identify specific ventures (activities and experiences) which are judged to be necessary in order to satisfy the specific objectives identified at our center.

Identification of Specific Needs or Areas

As we list our experiential needs in connection with top priority life and work objectives, students are encouraged to identify one or two week externships in settings which they wish to explore. Some will decide to drop out for a term or more to test out a career interest, nurture a skill, round out a flat spot or take care of a piece of developmental business which cannot be met on campus. Others will identify the need for a part time experience in a Charlotte business, or county government or a social service agency. The objective: to obtain the experience necessary in order to make fitting connections with such aspects of the world as needs, problems, people, events and geography. One cannot know whether an environment fits until, in one way or another, he or she tries it on for size.

This is a beginning. Students who go through the workshop generally report an increased capacity to take responsibility for their own self creation and the management of their life/learning/work. The fact that every term the numbers requesting the workshop are greater suggests that a real need is being met. Nearly a third of our students are voluntarily participating in Centering-Venturing Workshops. More people than ever before are seeking and finding educational experiences. Almost no one is now asking "What's available?"

Like every other aspect of learning, Centering-Venturing, as an educational methodology, works best when people are ready for it. I'm encouraged by the percentage of people at Davidson who are ready to find handles through Centering-Venturing for consciously creating and connecting their lives. And I do not believe for one minute that our students are one bit more ready for Centering-Venturing than any one else. Quality and quantity of life experience does seem to be a prerequisite for Centering-Venturing -- and neither the "intelligent" nor the "well-to-do" have a corner on experience. The so called disadvantaged "street people" with whom I worked a few years ago had been through more soul searching experiences at age 14 that most Davidson students at age 20. Everyone has access to experience and it is experience which teaches us the most about who we are, where we belong and what we are becoming.

Students Find Handles

I wonder if the Centering-Venturing process does not suggest an alternative to the apparent impass that exists in the issue of liberal arts vs. vocational education? I wonder if it is not possible to facilitate the kinds of attitudes and skills on the part of adult learners which will enable them to seek out or demand that which they need from general or vocational education in order to create their lives and connect appropriately with their environment through their life and their work.

An Alternative to the Apparent Impasse - Liberal Arts vs Vocational Education

It is widely recognized that our institutions of higher education are not the only places where students will learn what they need to know. And the late teens and early 20's is not the only time they will need support. Educational opportunities are available everywhere and always for

those who are in charge of their personal development. The liberal arts are a valuable resource and so is vocational education. What I question are those resources within both which are presently used to test, to prescribe, to manage, to direct, to place, to domesticate, to control students. Could not these be better used to support a process something like Centering-Venturing -- a process which will facilitate the learner's taking charge of his or her own learning, living, and working?

Fewer Carrots - More Resources

It is time for higher education to package fewer carrots and put more of its resources to work helping folks to grow their own.

Would not our institutions of higher learning become more satisfying and exciting places for us to work, or to learn, or to be if students were floundering less and managing their learning more purposefully?

Would not our world be a better place in which to live if people were more in touch with themselves and with their environment, more fully involved with the task of creating themselves and their world?

I do not know where the opportunities are, where the movement is, where the connections can be made in your community, but I do believe that all the ingredients are available and the time is now to help people recapture a sense of their integrity and potency in respect to their living, their learning and their working.

It may not have been your grandfather but I'll bet someone has modeled for you what it's like to achieve a measure of integration in life. From time to time you and I also are in touch with our integrity and our potency. In those moments we know its great value. And in those moments we may also recognize that which we need to do before our institutions of higher education, whether liberal or vocational,

will be able to facilitate integrity and potency on the part of all who have the vitality left to seek it out.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

MAR 31 1978

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
JUNIOR COLLEGES

UMHE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM

NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Dr. George T. Morgan	Synod Executive Synod of the Covenant Columbus, Ohio
The Rev. Henry Parker	Chaplain Berea College Berea, Kentucky
Mrs. Virginia Robertson	Stated Clerk Presbytery of the Cascades Portland, Oregon
Dr. Michael Saenz	President Tarrant County Junior College Northwest Campus Fort Worth, Texas
Dr. Donald Shepherd	Counselor Central Piedmont Community College Charlotte, North Carolina
Dr. Abel Sykes	President Compton Community College Compton, California
Dr. Sheila Tesar	Austin, Texas
Dr. Dale Tillery	Professor of Higher Education University of California Berkeley, California
Mrs. Libby Walthall	Director of Community Services Ashland Community College Ashland, Kentucky

UMHE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROGRAM STAFF TEAM

The Rev. W. E. Hallman, Director	Portland, Oregon
The Rev. Clyde Robinson	Charlotte, North Carolina
The Rev. Robert Mayo	New York, N. Y.

ADJUNCT STAFF

The Rev. Mark Rutledge	De Kalb, Illinois
Dr. Earl J. Lowell	Suffern, New York